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<u>Set Name</u>	<u>Query</u>	<u>Hit Count</u>	<u>Set Name</u>
side by side			result set
<i>DB=USPT; PLUR=NO; OP=OR</i>			
<u>L11</u>	L9 and 717/\$\$\$.ccls.	6	<u>L11</u>
<u>L10</u>	L9 and (first ADJ programming ADJ language)	0	<u>L10</u>
<u>L9</u>	L8 and C	43	<u>L9</u>
<u>L8</u>	L6 and (visual ADJ basic)	43	<u>L8</u>
<u>L7</u>	L6 and "C#"	64	<u>L7</u>
<u>L6</u>	L5 or l4	64	<u>L6</u>
<u>L5</u>	L3 and (toolkit)	55	<u>L5</u>
<u>L4</u>	L3 and (tool ADJ kit)	9	<u>L4</u>
<u>L3</u>	L2 and wrapper	126	<u>L3</u>
<u>L2</u>	LDAP	1251	<u>L2</u>
<u>L1</u>	Wrapper	16935	<u>L1</u>

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Understanding LDAP

WHITE PAPER

Posted: September 20, 2000

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Summary

This paper provides detailed information about LDAP, the directory service protocol used by the Active Directory® service. The download available from this page also includes a Powerpoint® presentation and other files to assist you in understanding and using LDAP.

Light Weight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) is an open network protocol standard designed to provide access to distributed directories. LDAP provides a mechanism for querying and modifying information that resides in a directory information tree (DIT). A directory information tree typically contains a broad range of information about different types of network objects including users, printers, applications, and other network resources. LDAP is described through four basic models: Information, Naming, Functional, and Security. The combination of these models introduces a nomenclature that describes entries and their attributes, and provides methods to query and manipulate their values.

This paper provides the following information:

- LDAP Fundamentals introduces the four models that describe LDAP and presents additional concepts that are relevant to the understanding of LDAP.
- Core LDAP APIs describes the fundamental APIs that are used to expose the LDAP protocol. Each API is reviewed from a programmatic point of view with respect to what is actually placed on the network wire. It is important to remember that LDAP is a network protocol standard, not a defined API standard. While there exist well-known APIs to access the LDAP protocol, each API is vendor-specific. The goal of this paper is not to analyze the different vendor implementations of LDAP APIs, but rather to study LDAP from a network protocol point of view.
- Interpreting LDAP errors. In addition to the RFC-defined errors that are returned by a Directory Server Agent (DSA) to a client, additional error information may be obtained from a network trace. How to interpret that error information is the focus of the final section. Included with this document download is a file called Demo.vbs, a sample Visual Basic Scripting (.vbs) script that illustrates use of LDAP.

Also included are the following Network Monitor trace files associated with running the Demo.vbs sample:

- Authentication.cap: a network trace associated with establishing a connection using the Authentication APIs.
- Interrogation.cap: a network trace associated with directory search requests and responses using the Interrogation APIs.
- Update.cap: a network trace associated with updating the directory information tree using the Update APIs.